



State of Connecticut
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Commission on Children



School Readiness and Early Reading Success Update

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School Readiness and Early Reading Success: Connecticut Leads the Way

Connecticut is the first state in the nation to link School Readiness and school steadiness through a comprehensive School Readiness and Early Reading Success strategy. The School Readiness legislation seeks to create high quality school readiness settings and to rapidly grow the supply of preschool with excellent teachers, quality practices and open access for young children, ages three and four. The Early Reading Success Bill seeks to ensure that children are reading at grade level by the fourth grade, with best literacy practices available to them from kindergarten through grade three.

The School Readiness and Early Reading Success legislation are partners in a state vision to bolster care, safety and lifelong learning for the next generation. Comprehensive needs assessments and community plans, utilization of best practices, benchmarking, evaluations and teacher training are the underpinnings of both policies.

Stages of Five-Year School Readiness Plan

The first two years of the School Readiness program entailed building the School Readiness Councils, assessing need, and funding 4,000 - 5,000 School Readiness slots. There was rapid infusion of resources with high expectations and a quick response time required. Implementation of the School Readiness plans in years three to five offers more opportunity to plan for growth.

Successes in School Readiness

To date, successes include:

1. Local School Readiness Councils have been established in every priority school district. These councils, chaired by the CEO of the town and the Superintendent of schools or their designees, have brought together traditional and non-traditional stakeholders to assess school readiness locally. Towns with severe needs schools have also established Councils. Some additional towns are beginning to establish School Readiness Councils, recognizing that local and regional analysis of need will benefit quality and supply of care and education for children.
2. The School Readiness Councils, approved 117 sub-grantees to provide school readiness services. These include diverse settings - 14 Head Starts, five Family Resource Centers and 92 private preschool programs. Severe needs schools utilized a diverse system of providers including four Head Starts, four public schools, seven Family Resource Centers and 27 private preschool programs.
3. As of October 31, 1998 supply has increased for 4,347 children in Connecticut. The number of children served is expected to significantly increase by June 30, 1999.
4. The School Readiness legislation addressed quality by investing in substantive training and a career ladder for providers. More than 1500 child care providers have had initial training and 800 more are beginning training.
5. Through CHEFA, the state launched a significant loan opportunity to address the shortage of space for early care and education expansion. Seven sites have been funded and nine more are in process which will create 3,183 child care slots.
6. Quality innovations have been tested through the Quality Enhancement Grants. Examples of innovations are extensive including resource library development, parent education programs, NAEYC accreditation support, enhanced training of providers and health care linkages.
7. Connecticut has linked the School Readiness and Early Reading Success legislation with an AmeriCorps grant to teach young children pre-literacy skills Connecticut was one of only 11 state grants given nationally and the only grant given for early literacy.
8. School Readiness and Early Reading Success have been linked through the state library system. Public librarians are acting as partners with parents, child care providers, school media specialists and teachers to develop a continuum of support.
9. Training in health care referrals was piloted by the Children's Health Council. The Children's Health Project has conducted trainings for more than 100 providers to begin the utilization of child care providers as referring agents for young children's health care.
10. Approximately 20,000 police background checks are now done each year on child care provider applications to ensure safe environments for children.

11. Fairfield County municipal leaders have come together to look at School Readiness comprehensively from a town-by-town and a regional perspective. Mayors will lead this study and track suggestions. The report is a partnership with the Fairfield County Foundation, Connecticut Commission on Children, and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities.

Challenges

As in any sudden infusion of resources to improve and grow an industry, fine-tuning must be made each stage to facilitate expansion. A recent report from the Department of Education suggests that priority school districts had difficulty fully attaining their growth goals in the past two years. Most child care providers have guided the growth of the child, not the growth of the industry. The field itself, until the infusion of resources and expectation of PA 97-259, An Act Concerning School Readiness, was not in a growth stage. This has now changed.

Facilities Expansion

There is still a shortage of space in most towns to expand School Readiness sites. Facilities expansion was available through the state School Readiness legislation, offering low cost loans of numerous proportions to providers. However, some child care providers did not have the technical skills to expand facilities. Seven School Readiness projects were financed by CHEFA in '98 and an additional nine programs have applied for financing in Pool # 2 in the spring of '99. This will create 3,183 child care slots. Funding for at least 2,000 additional slots needs to be included within the next biennial budget. The CHEFA loan fund needs to be increased and technical support provided to guide the School Readiness Councils and the child care providers in accessing the funding.

Outreach for quality applicants is necessary.

Several School Readiness Councils found that they did not have enough quality program applicants to support. It is clear that waiting for quality candidates to apply is not sufficient. School Readiness Councils will need to take a more aggressive role in outreach for quality sites.

Business and political leadership is needed locally.

The skills to grow in the field and to hasten growth are imperative. This policy and program vision is often in the framework of mayors and business leaders but rarely in the work repertoires of early childhood providers. A partnership is imperative with business and municipal policy leaders to ensure that the School Readiness program is fully funded and fully implemented.

Next Steps for Quality Growth

Need continues to surpass supply and quality must continue. Next steps should include:

1. Fully funding years three and four of the five-year phase-in plan for School Readiness to provide operations funding for an additional 4,000 - 5,000 School Readiness slots.
2. Increase debt service funding so that CHEFA can provide financing for more child development centers. Clarification will also be needed on how to access and utilize the CHEFA loan funds. Assessment of others methods of building growth will also be needed.

3. School Readiness Councils need the flexibility in towns to spend up to \$75,000 on renovations to a facility that would result in increased licensed capacity for 3 and 4 year old children, provided established criteria are met.
4. A School Readiness coordinating body of state policy leaders and executive branch officials needs to meet regularly to review the strengths and obstacles of the program and to work state to local and across state governance structures.
5. Technical assistance will need to be developed to create a team on the state level to work with local sites, in meeting growth and capacity.
6. Increase funding to fully train child care providers in child development health care referrals.
7. Funding should be expanded to include bringing in high quality family day care providers for training in linking school readiness participation with health care.
8. A longitudinal has been designed by Ellen Galinsky of the Families and Work Institute to assess the impact of the program on children.

**Capacity and Allocation (Excluding 1997 Carryover)
Priority School Districts, FY 98-99**

Towns \$FY 98-99	Allocation Slots Contracted 98-99	Full Time Slots Contracted 98-99	Part Time Slots Contracted 98-99	Extended Total/Slots Contracted 98-99	Capacity Total/slots Contracted 98-99	Enrollment as of 10/31/99	Enrollment as of 1/31/99	Full Time Slots as of 2/19/99	Part Time Slots as of 2/19/99	Extended Slots as of 2/19/99	Capacity Total/Slots Contracted as of 2/19/99	Slots Projected 6/30/99
Bridgeport	5,651,628	828	6	123	957	771	837	764	32	115	911	970
Bristol	1,008,252	137	24	51	212	126	135	137	24	51	212	212
Danbury	1,281,238	153	55	46	254	173	195	153	55	46	254	254
East Hartford	1,100,254	104	26	18	148	133	139	104	26	18	148	192
Hartford	6,271,973	591	333	136	1060	521	556	602	227	136	965	965
Meriden	1,487,862	154	60	1	215	151	171	154	60	1	215	256
Middletown	920,177	71	40	36	147	120	133	99	45	36	180	188
New Britain	2,093,945	230	121	0	351	236	261	240	115	0	355	351
New Haven	4,898,173	556	48	158	762	579	658	501	48	158	707	707
New London	677,332	50	66	0	116	116	113	50	66	0	116	116
Norwalk	2,155,993	228	0	40	268	168	260	266	20	80	366	366
Stamford	2,578,032	216	64	102	382	406	441	312	64	102	478	533
Waterbury	3,952,541	373	0	153	526	401	423	379	0	153	532	670
Windham	595,600	90	2	0	92	43	73	84	1	0	85	100
Totals	34,673,000	3781	845	864	5490	3944	4395	3845	783	896	5524	
										+32	+34	

Source: Approved FY 98-99 School Readiness Budget, Aces Report 10/31/98 *School Readiness, Revenue Reports and Demographic Data Forms* Grants Management Office, 1998-1999 *School Readiness Allocations, June 1998* The slot capacity on June 30 1998 was 2,935 and when compared to the most recent data capacity has increased by 2,588 slots or 88%

Five hundred and three (503) slots have been developed in Severe Need School districts. The 503 slots are utilized in the following program types:

- 360 full day/full year slots
- 143 part day/part year slots

The capacity in the severe need school districts has increased by 191 slots from June 30, 1998.

Financing for New Child Care Centers: It Doesn't Hurt to Ask

"Don't be afraid of the process," says Jeffery A. Asher, Manager Director/CFO of the Connecticut Health and Education Facilities Authority (CHEFA). We're here to assist." Once we complete all these facilities in Pool I, we will have helped to create approximately 1500 slots. Financing for Pool 2 will be approved this spring. We hope that if the state legislature moves the debt-service appropriations beyond the \$2.5 million, we can help create 2000 additional slots." For more information call 520-4001.

Debt Service Coverage Report
CCFLF Pooled Tax-Exempt Bond Issue

Project	DSS Payment	DSS % Support	New Slots	Total Slots
Financing Completed, Pool #1				
Access Vernon	\$30,135	74.6	8	100
Access Windham	51,813	78.8	89	141
Bristol Preschool	60,726	82.2	84	235
Hill Parent Child Center, New Haven	85,470	81.4	104	174
The Marvin Norwalk	34,331	84.5	40	40
CCC Stamford	262,844	75	360	360
NOW of Waterbury (Stand Alone Project)	410,429	86.6	0	472
Sub total	\$935,748	80.4	685	1522
Financing Prospects for Pool #2				
Family Center of Bristol	\$102,236	80	107	110
CAC Danbury	46,843	80	50	125
Christian Activities Council, Hartford	263,494	80	216	216
Shiloh Baptist, Middletown	12,765	80	32	32
Hall Neighborhood House, Bridgeport	269,600	80	200	220
Manchester ELC	35,132	80	10	50
Terryville/Plymouth CDC	29,277	80	76	76
Mt. Olive CDC Hartford	153,023	80	0	120
CRT of Hartford (Stand Alone Project)	221,906	80	419	712
Sub total	\$1,134,276	80	1110	1661
Total	\$2,070,024	80.2	1795	3183

Quality Enhancement: A Little State Funding Goes A Long Way

In the second year of School Readiness funding, School Readiness Councils in Priority School Districts are working to improve the quality of early childhood programs. Quality preschool is correlated to higher outcomes in growth cognitive and social gains.

The Priority School District communities have utilized this money in a varied and individualistic approach. Some of the strategies include:

Towns	Resource Library	Mini-Grant Program	Q. E. Coordinator	Training of Providers	Materials	Accreditation Support	Parent Education
Bridgeport			X	X	X		X
Bristol							X
Danbury		X	X	X			X
East Hartford			X				X
Hartford			X	X			X
Middletown		X	X	X			X
New Britain			X	X			
New Haven	X		X	X			X
New London				X		X	X
Norwalk	X	X	X	X		X	
Stamford			X	X			
Waterbury			X	X	X	X	X
Windham			X	X			X

Initiatives funded by the grant include dedicated quality enhancement staff to coach or mentor programs to improve program quality, enrich curriculum, train staff, or support quality components, such as health. Family home day care providers, through newly created community resource centers, are provided with materials, supplies, training workshops and support to pursue accreditation. Several communities have established resource libraries that offer books and videos.

Training Program in Child Development

By Mary Hess, Director, Research and Development, Wheeler Clinic
and Darlene Ragozzine Director, Chats-A-Course

Research continues to show a strong correlation between the training of child care providers and positive outcomes for children. In addition, professional development has been cited as a key element to children's learning. The 1997 School Readiness Legislation called for a professional development plan and full implementation of Connecticut Chats-A-Course (CCAC), the State's early care and education career development system.

The care of more than 10,000 of Connecticut's children has been enhanced by the first major training initiative of Connecticut's Early Childhood Training and Resource Academy. Funded by DSS and the Children's Fund of Connecticut with the support of the Connecticut Commission on Children, 21 training providers at 47 sites throughout the state enrolled more than 1500 child care providers in a 15 hour training sequence approved by CCAC. About half of the participants were licensed family day care providers and relatives who provide child care. Half were center-based staff. More than 200 participants were trained in Spanish. Eighty percent of the participants completed the entire 15 hours.

A second round of training began for 1200 who completed the 15 hours and want to continue with the next 30 hours of training in child development. A new group of 800 began the first 15 hour training sequence. It is estimated that 2000 child care providers will have participated in these training programs by June 30, 1999.

Wheeler Clinic provides administrative services for this initiative. Call 1-888-793-3500 x 3879 for information and training locations.

Linking Health Care and Child Care

By Peter Libassi, President Children Fund of Connecticut Inc.

One out of four children enters kindergarten ill prepared to learn. Of these children one out of eight is in poor health. Child care providers have the potential to be front line advocates for the health of children in their care. These providers are with their children for much of the day and are in a unique position to observe and monitor, the health status and the developmental progress of these children.

Bridging health and child care services is the focus of a training program involving more than 2,000 child care providers. The Departments of Social Services and Mental Retardation, Wheeler Clinic, CCAC, the Children's Fund of Connecticut and 21 training organizations have pooled their talents and resources to launch the first statewide training program of this scale.

The University of Connecticut and Yale University medical schools are developing health related training materials and videos that will include: serving children with special needs; enrolling children in the HUSKY program; and child growth and development.

The goal is to equip child care providers with information to enable them to promote the health and well-being of their children and to identify, at the earliest possible moment, conditions calling for intervention by medical professionals.

School Readiness in New Haven: Impact and Next Steps

Accomplishments

According to the 1997 Strategic Plan, 45 percent of New Haven's 4,300 3 and 4 year olds live in poverty. Prior to School Readiness funding New Haven determined that it needed 1,500 additional child care slots. During the first year of the School Readiness grant, New Haven funded 15 programs to serve 410 children. Now, more than 20 sub-grantees enroll 707 children in 35 School Readiness sites.

Not all 707 slots are new. Given the need for full day preschool, School Readiness funds helped convert 200 part time spaces into full day/full year slots. Program choice was expanded by making 11 once unaffordable centers accessible to 130 low-income families. Eight of these programs are now NAEYC accredited.

Next Steps:

Developing new child care facilities will be part of a more aggressive development phase in years three - five. A CHEFA financed facility operated by LULAC Head Start will open in October 1999 and will serve 175 infants, toddlers and preschoolers. Two other planned facilities will serve another 100 children. Adding a coordinated network of high quality family day care homes will help parents seeking jobs, or needing child care during non-traditional hours. The School Readiness Council projects to serve 950 children in year three FY 99-2000.

Bridgeport School Readiness

Accomplishments

As of January, 1999, 837 three and four year old Bridgeport children were attending School Readiness Programs.

A monthly providers network helps School Readiness providers with issues of hiring and training of staff, NAEYC accreditation, and children with challenging behaviors.

- Four Readiness Council subcommittees have begun to address:
- Accreditation, licensing, training and inservice;
- Family support
- Facility acquisition

- Health/Medical
- A Special Education Task Force is addressing the concerns of the increased enrollment of children with special needs.

Growth Reporting

- Many child care agencies are acquiring and renovating space for additional slots. The YMCA is applying for CHEFA funds for 36 additional slots at 651 State Street.
- Many purchased slots and 10 additional slots at St. Mark's were contracted 12/98.
- ASPIRA will start operating 40 slots in late February/early March at the Bridgeport Board of Education Learning and Enrichment Center.
- ABCD has still not located space for 60 slots.

Next Steps

- Hire the remaining Readiness and Quality Enhancement staff to act as coaches to improve the quality of all programs through on site consultation and monitoring.
 - Track four-year old School Readiness children from 1997/98 who have moved into public school kindergartens to determine the effectiveness of each program.
 - Increase capacity by 400-600 slots over the next two years to meet the needs/demands. Increased slot funding for School Readiness is critical for the successful implementation of Bridgeport's School Readiness plan
-

Stamford School Readiness

Accomplishments

In the first year School Readiness dollars enabled Stamford to serve 96 new full day children and 102 extended day Head Start children. Slots opened in several centers, two new centers were licensed and fully enrolled and were completely operational before Christmas 1997, one in an elementary school and one in a community center. The 1997 grant was written to segregate operational dollars from start-up costs for expansion in 1998-1999. In July of 1998, 200 more spaces were added for children to meet the requirements of the grant.

The School Readiness council applied for CHEFA funding to renovate a former Board of Education building to be used for School Readiness. We moved into this building in January 1999.

Growth Reporting

Over the next two years Stamford hopes to address the needs of 400 unserved three year old children who do not currently have access to School Readiness Programs. Prior to the adoption of the School Readiness legislation, Stamford had 30 percent (approximately 400) four-year-old

children entering kindergarten without pre-k experience. The Child Care Center programs had 800 children on the waiting list.

Next Steps

Stamford School Readiness is currently serving primarily four-year-old children. We have yet to address the problem of three year old children, although we know that a two year experience is more than twice as valuable as one year. We estimate that there are at least 400 unserved three-year-old children who do not have access to quality, affordable, accessible pre-k experiences. We intend to utilize increased School Readiness funding for years 3 and 4 of the five-year phase-in FY 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 to address this unmet need.

New London Plans School Readiness Expansion

Accomplishments

Before the School Readiness legislation, New London had:

- No connection between schools and child care providers; and
- No space for preschool classrooms.

In the first two years, New London has filled 116 School Readiness slots. How did they do this? The Children's First initiative, the School Readiness Council and the Early Reading Success each piggybacked their efforts with the same providers for all three initiatives. This assured that all were heading down the road together. LEARN oversees the budget. Child and Families was involved in a quality enhancement effort in the area of health and nutrition.

Growth Reporting

A preschool kindergarten magnet school is being proposed which could open in 2002. It will enroll 100 preschoolers from New London and 100 from Waterford. There will be 110 full day kindergartners, 60 special education children from New London and 40 from Waterford. Plans call for the school to stress language, literacy and family engagement. Full funding of the School Readiness program for years three and four will be needed if it is to become a reality.

New London School Readiness dollars are now being used for School Readiness slots in Groton where parents work. School Readiness dollars have helped set up the administration that has brought people together to help children. There are more children who need to be served. "New London has done a lot right and feels it's time to let people know about the successes," said Mary Yankura, Co-Chair of the New London School Readiness Council.

Connecticut, New York and New Jersey Working Together on Early Childhood

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund awarded Connecticut a tri-state grant to bring New York, New Jersey and Connecticut together on their early childhood initiatives. The three state's preschool initiatives include:

- New York is establishing pre-kindergarten for all four year olds and full-day kindergarten by 2001-02;
- New Jersey mandated high quality intensive preschool education for three and four year olds in special needs districts and other districts;
- Connecticut's School Readiness and Early Reading Success initiatives are designed to bolster the quality and supply of preschool and to ensure the reading skills of children in early elementary grades.

Topics that the three states are investigating include: constituency and partner linkages, quality programs and providers, facilities financing, and media strategies. For information contact Alisa Shilor at the Commission on Children, 860-240-0290.

Connecticut Praised Nationally for School Readiness and Early Reading Success Legislation

Connecticut has been recognized by the National Governor's Association, the National Council of State Legislators, the Carter Center and the French-American Foundation for its innovations in early childhood policy. Representatives Cameron Staples and Denise Merrill, and Executive Director of the Commission on Children, Elaine Zimmerman have presented in Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC for other states to replicate Connecticut's School Readiness and Early Reading Success legislation. The latest *NCSL Journal* promotes the School Readiness work of Connecticut. A *Philadelphia Inquirer* editorial touts the legislation's focus on quality, the expansion to full day, year round care, the CHEFA financing to bolster construction, attention to NAEYC standards, parent involvement, the child care provider as referring agent to health care, Charters-A-Course teacher training and career ladders, and the combining of education and social service dollars to expand hours and enhance quality.

Cornerstone Consulting Recommendations

Cornerstone Consulting reviewed the School Readiness legislation and its implementation to date. Recommendations include:

- Strong local leadership, supported by School Readiness Councils, that reflect the views of multiple constituencies;
- A state/local partnership to ensure broad accountability for meeting the legislative objectives;
- Statewide outcomes, developed and adopted by multiple state agencies and School Readiness Councils; and

- Technical assistance to increase the capacity of both the state and local School Readiness partners.

Readiness Legislation Guides Transition to School and Model Lab School

By Beth Bye, Director, School for Young Children, Saint Joseph College

One of the first identified needs of the West Hartford School Readiness Council was to improve the communication between elementary teachers and preschool teachers in town. All licensed preschool and family child care providers and all kindergarten teachers met to plan for better communication. Plans were made to have:

- Preschool teachers give pertinent information about children to kindergarten teachers;
- Preschool teachers visit kindergarten classes;
- Develop a uniform assessment form shared by preschool and public schools;
- The kindergarten curriculum given to preschool teachers.

West Hartford and the School for Young Children were awarded a \$300,000 grant to develop a Model Lab School, housed at Saint Joseph College in a new preschool facility that will open in August 1999. The money will be used to support the professional development of teachers at School Readiness programs in town and to develop a preschool curriculum aligned with the town's kindergarten curriculum. The new site will have extensive observation and audiovisual capacity and a resource center for families and teachers. None of these developments would have taken place without the collaboration of the pre-school and school communities initiated through the School Readiness Council.

Family Day Care Homes in the School Readiness Program

By Shirle Moone Childs, DSE Early Childhood

SDE and DSS, are exploring the feasibility of using family day care homes to expand the number of full-day placements in the School Readiness Program.

Connecticut has 5,025 licensed family day care providers with the capacity to care for 31,325 children full time and 15,194 school age children, before and after school. There are currently 16 accredited family day care homes in the state, and 135 family child care providers have attained a Child Development Associates (CDA) credential with many more in the training program. Family day care homes, accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), have the potential of being School Readiness sites provided they meet DPH licensure and SDE/DSS criteria. A sub-grantee, or "coordinating" agency will manage a network of family day care home providers.

The supplementary criteria includes:

1. The provider must possess a CDA credential, or a four year or Associate Degree in early childhood education;

2. Homes that care for children under the age of three must have a minimum of two adults on site for two and one-half hours a day. One of the two adults must hold a CDA credential, a four year degree, or an Associate Degree in early childhood education;
3. The provider must be a member of a family day care association network that can provide technical assistance and training, and be enrolled in Connecticut Charts-A-Course Registry;
4. The provider must be accredited or in the process by National Association Family Child. The SDE and DSS anticipate incorporating the ability for School Readiness Councils to consider eligible family day care providers in the next RFP to be issued in 1999.

Books and Bucks

Who gets what in 1998-99 under the Early Reading Success and School Readiness initiatives approved by the General Assembly?

Municipality	School Readiness Grant	Early Reading Success Grant	Library Books Grant
Bridgeport	\$5,651,628	\$2,875,284	\$488,994
Bristol	1,008,252	512,951	87,237
Danbury	1,281,238	651,834	110,856
E. Hartford	1,100,254	559,758	95,197
Hartford	6,271,973	3,190,886	542,668
Meriden	1,487,862	756,955	128,734
Middletown	920,177	468,143	79,616
New Britain	2,093,945	1,065,301	181,174
New Haven	4,898,173	2,491,961	423,803
New London	677,332	344,595	58,606
Norwalk	2,155,993	1,096,868	186,542
Stamford	2,578,032	1,311,582	223,058
Waterbury	3,952,541	2,010,868	341,984
Windham	595,600	303,013	51,533
Total	\$34,673,000	\$17,639,999	\$3,000,002

In addition a number of other communities, including Ansonia, Derby, Hamden, Milford, Shelton, Stratford and West Haven can apply for \$100,000 grants for specific reading and readiness initiatives.

Source: State Department of Education

New Literacy Schools Program Provides Year-Round Assistance to Teachers **By Dr. Herman Lujan, Chief Academic Officer, Connecticut State Universities**

Teacher training is key to good child reading outcomes. The Early Reading Success legislation requires current and new teachers to learn the most current methods of teaching reading, assessment, diagnostics, intervention strategies and reading comprehension, particularly for the 40 percent of children who have difficulty with reading mastery.

Recognizing this, the Deans of the Schools of Education at CSU are working jointly with school administrators, teachers, parents and CSU faculty to design a Literacy Schools Program. Year-round assistance will be available for the professional development of faculty. A literacy specialist in residence will coordinate the resources and activities that fit the literacy needs of a given school. Chat rooms, online instruction and e-mail will bring advice and resources to teachers. After-school programs, Saturday schools and summer opportunities will be considered. Literacy Councils will include parents, board members, district leadership, bargaining unit representatives and university faculty experienced in the field.

Reading: So What's The Big Deal

Critical factors predicting dropouts: If a child is poor, attends school with other poor children, is retained at least once during the first three years of school, and is reading below grade level at the end of the third grade, the chance of that child graduating from high school is near zero.

Effective reading programs have long term payoffs: Students who learn to read in the first three grades contribute to significant reductions in referrals to special education, Title One, and even later in health, welfare and the Department of Corrections.

Primary goal of public education is to teach every child to read by the end of the third grade: Reading is so important that if little else is taught during the early grades, it will be worthwhile. It would be better for a student who learned to read to drop out of school after the second or third grade than to stay in school till the eighth or ninth grade and drop out of school without being able to read effectively.

... from Hope At Last For At-Risk Youth,

Robert D. Barr and William H. Parrett, Allyn & Bacon, 1995

School and Public Library Early Reading Success Partnerships

By Susan Cormier, Children's Services Consultant, Connecticut State Library

The Early Reading Success Bill created a vital link between the state's public libraries, school districts and local School Readiness Councils.

School/Public Library Partnerships are most effective when towns establish a team consisting of a school library media specialist, a representative appointed by the public library director and a school reading specialist. At least one member of the team should also be a member of the School Readiness Council. The overall task of the partnership committee is to develop a plan with objectives and collaborating activities that will improve pre-reading and reading skills.

Both types of libraries contribute to early reading success. Library Media Centers create a print rich environment in the school, support reading instruction, and circulate recreational reading material to all students. Public libraries provide early literacy programs, parent training, preschool outreach, and reading promotion.

The flood of research about children and reading demonstrates that parents, teachers, caregivers and librarians need to promote reading to children as a life long activity beginning at birth and continuing throughout the school years.

Early Reading Success

Through the Early Reading Success bill, \$17.6 million goes this year to the state's 14 neediest school districts. Another 20 communities will get competitive \$100,000 grants from a \$2.3 million pool. Each community must spend at least half of their grant on new or expanded programs that have a direct impact on reading: summer and after-school programs, tutoring, teacher training and materials. The rest can be used to reduce class size or increase the number of full-day kindergartens.

Already other states are taking notes. "They're all interested to know how we developed the concept and how we financed it," said Speaker Moira Lyons, a chief sponsor of the bill. Connecticut approved the bill to help answer the Sheff vs. O'Neill School desegregation decision by putting urban school children on an equal footing with suburban students. In 1997, 45 percent of the state's fourth graders did not meet the state goal for reading on the Connecticut Mastery Test. In urban districts, more than 80 percent missed the goal.

In **New Haven**, which has \$2.4 million to spend, the expansion of summer school to include reading is just one strategy envisioned. New Haven students who are one year or more behind by grade three attend a special Saturday Academy and must attend summer school. The district also wants to increase the number of literacy mentors who help classroom teachers. Many of those mentors will be graduate students, fresh out of college and trained in the latest teaching methods.

In **Bridgeport**, which has more than \$2.8 million to spend, much of the focus will be on teacher training as well. It will be the most extensive professional development the district has seen. Starting last October, about 70 reading specialists began working with elementary classroom teachers at 10 schools. Teachers at the remaining 20 schools will be trained in subsequent years. The approach is balanced between phonics, where students learn by sounding out words, and a literacy-based method where students learn new words through the context of what they can already read. In addition, each lower-grade classroom is promised a 300-book library.

Stamford second-graders who are behind in reading are required to spend an hour a day after school working on their skills.

Waterbury will open a Saturday school in March for more than 600 students in third grade and below.

Milford Board of Education unanimously approved full day kindergarten in each elementary school to be implemented September 1999. This year a full day kindergarten program was initiated at one school using an Early Reading Success Bill grant. "It made a considerable difference to have the Early Reading Success Bill. Having one school with full day kindergarten raised the expectation that it should be at all schools," said Dr. Mary Jo Kramer.

Norwalk, which gets a little more than \$1 million in the first year of the program, also wants to invest in more books for pupils in kindergarten to third grade. Funds will be used to train classroom teachers in new reading strategies, add two teachers to the dozen already used to provide one-on-one tutoring to first graders, and find ways to involve parents in addressing the reading problems of their children.

To measure the success of the program, Speaker Lyons said the state will look to the mastery test, which it gives each fall in fourth, sixth and eighth grades.

The State Department of Education offered **Early Literacy Academies** to teachers during the summer of 1998. Training for four-person building-level teams of primary level teachers included using various literacy assessments and techniques to plan more effective instruction. Team members will be able to:

- Rely on each other for assistance when learning and administering the assessments;
- Serve as models for other colleagues in their building and/or district.

The academies reached nearly 400 teachers from 70 different school districts. SDE is planning to include more teachers during the summer of 1999.